

## Syria's Reconciliation Agreements

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Local truces in the Syrian conflict, what the regime called reconciliation (*muslaha*) agreements and the great powers later termed de-escalation or deconfliction zones have varied, over time, largely according to the changing balance of power. They ranged from compromises in which after a cease fire opposition fighters remained involved in security and governance roles in their areas, to cases of virtual opposition surrender involving evacuations of fighters or even whole populations.

### The Context Shaping “Reconciliation:” the Changing Balance of Power

The Syrian government and opposition force had, from quite early on, negotiated truces in limited areas, but greater impetus was given to this by growing incapacity of either side to win the war. The regime, facing manpower shortages that precluded the re-conquest of opposition areas, took the lead in trying, instead, to impose settlements piece by piece on the arenas on the margins of government controlled areas where opposition concentrations were most threatening. The truces reflected and formalized the reality of a war of attrition, in which advances are incremental and difficult to hold, tending to fragment control. Also, the failure of national level “top-down” political negotiations, notably Geneva II, led the third UN mediator, Stephan DeMistura to propose in November 2014 less ambitious bottom up local truces in order to reduce the violence and in the hopes these would acquire momentum enabling national level negotiations stalemate to be overcome (Beals 2017).

The shifting balance of power tended to determine the pace and kind of agreement. In the Damascus area, the regime benefited from the opposition's fragmentation, inability to coordinate combined offensives and vulnerability to being picked off one by one. Populations became alienated as opposition fighters failed to shield people from the regime's sieges and air assaults as well as by their infighting over control of supplies and access points, personal power and doctrinal differences (among Islamists). (Glass 2017; Lund, 2017b). Another factor was the co-optation of opposition FSA forces by Jordan and Turkey, to secure their borders and fight IS and PYD rather than Asad. Most notably, the Russian intervention, the fall of Aleppo and Turkey's realignment with Russia, giving up on the goal of overthrowing Asad, set up a certain bandwagoning toward the apparently winning regime side. (Samaha 2017). When surveyed as to why the opposition was accepting deals with the regime, respondents cited relief from sieges, bringing security, declining prospect of military victory over the regime and an opportunity to recoup arms. (Turkmani and Kaldour 2014). After years of unrest, massacres and deadlocks, public opinion seems to shift in favour of the security and safety which the regime could deliver (Lakitsch 2017).

After its 2015 intervention, Russia's strategy started to dominate the settlement process. Moscow proposed “de-escalation/de-confliction zones” to contain the conflict. The medium-term goal would be something resembling post-civil war Bosnia, with government and opposition forces responsible for security in their own areas. (Memorandum; Applying Bosnia Model). In the shorter term, getting the moderate fighters to accept de-escalation would in practice bring them to accept the Asad regime and, at times, allow them to be used against the jihadists. At the Astana meeting, the 13 armed factions, having suffered battlefield losses, especially in Aleppo and loss of backing from Turkey, were brought, albeit unwillingly, into the negotiations over what became the Astana agreement, (AP 2017). It specified four de-escalation zones-- northern Homs, Ghouta, south Dera/Quneitra and Idlib and parts of neighbouring provinces. Not only would fighting stop in these areas, but the government was obliged to allow humanitarian aid, restore public services and allow refugees to return; also having little choice, Damascus said that although it would abide by the agreement, it would continue fighting “terrorism” –a label it applies to all armed rebel groups. Opposition militants recognized the agreement aimed to split the FSA from the jihadists, thus divide the opposition to Assad's benefit. Russia, Turkey and Iran were to provide forces to police the ceasefire, although agreement over the details was not reached. The Putin-Trump pact — detailed in a Memorandum of Principle for De-escalation in Southern Syria — established a similar cease-fire between Syrian government forces and armed opposition in southern Syria that

would maintain the existing division of control between the two sides, though, unlike Astana, it did not recognize any role for Iran, directly or indirectly (i.e. Hizbullah), in securing this agreement.

In essence, the military opposition has come to terms with the fact that it must separate from the jihadist groups, that it must come to terms with a heavy Russian role and presence because the alternative is Iran, and that changing the Asad regime is, at the very least, no longer achievable in the short run. The 'deconfliction zones' constitute the only tangible 'achievement' the opposition can claim on the ground, since they are in theory areas which are not completely under government control, and yet under some form of international protection. Because these zones are only clearly defined in terms of the areas they cover, rather than in actual nature, both the regime and the opposition will attempt to impose their respective modes of governance and security.

### **Regime Discourse**

The Syrian government professes to follow a policy of dialogue regarding political reform with all domestic parties "which rejected foreign interference and violence, " while combating foreign-backed insurgencies. Following the failed Geneva II conference in which it claims the "foreign – backed opposition" excluded itself from the reform process, internal dialogue was asserted to be the only viable peaceful exit from the conflict. (SANA 2014; nsnbc international, 2014)

National reconciliation was a " strategic vision" articulated by President Bashar al-Asad (al-Baath Newspaper). The government established a Ministry of National Reconciliation in 2012 under Ali Haidar who claims successful conclusion 50 reconciliation projects as of September 30, 2015 (Stone 2016). The strategy was to separate the foreign fighters from Syrian fighters and the "terrorists" from moderate fighters who could be "brought to their senses."(Adleh and Favier 2017). He presented a benign representation of the process: the ministry selects influential local people to form a committee of reconciliation which contacts the fighters and offers safe passage out of the area for those fighters who refuse reconciliation and amnesty for those who lay down their arms. The latter are invited to join the army and many, the regime claims, do so. President Assad granted blanket amnesties eight times in the last five years for a total of about 20,000 former Syrian "mercenaries." In July 2016, Assad issued Legislative Decree No. 15, the legal basis for 'reconciliation,' which includes amnesty for those who 'turn themselves in and lay down their weapons.' (Ezzi, 2017). Opposition supporters are guaranteed the right to work with the (unarmed) Syrian internal opposition. The Syrian media conveyed the view that the people in opposition controlled areas wanted (SANA, Oct 2015) to embrace national reconciliation, but were afraid of violent reprisal from terrorist organizations. Reconciliation would boost trust between citizens and officials, settle the legal status of youths who decided to lay down their weapons, address the issue of missing people, and enable humanitarian aid. "Reconciliations are doing very well now," said President Assad's adviser, Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban. "And there are many areas in the pipeline. We feel that this is the best way to end the war."(Glass 2017)

How does the regime see the cumulative outcome of reconciliation? Legislative Decree 107, has been said to provide a potential framework for a post- conflict devolution of political authority that will allow all sides of the conflict to retain some degree of control over the areas under their jurisdiction; yet, it also grants wide powers and to a presidential appointed governor at the province level (Aarabi 2017). Giving the present alternatives, that may well be an ideal outcome allowing at least some power-sharing.

### **Regime Strategy**

However People's Assembly speaker Hadiyah Abbas gave a more realistic assessment in describing reconciliation as a way "to enhance the victories achieved by the Syrian Arab Army against the terrorist organizations." (SANA, Sept 2016). Indeed, sources close to the regime see reconciliation as part of a sophisticated regime survival strategy. This strategy combines negotiations with the opposition, with the unrestrained use of force, (relying on Russia for diplomatic protection at the UNSC against international reaction) reflecting the regime view that one can never negotiate from weakness. However, faced with manpower constraints, rather than risk significant regime casualties, the regime came to pursue a policy of siege and waiting until the villages or towns are finally ready to capitulate (which the older notables would pressure the

fighters to accept.). The state security system, armed with intelligence files amassed over generations, knew its enemies and their vulnerabilities. Discovering that no tactic worked everywhere, the regime's negotiators offered different kinds of deals in different areas; for example those that demonstrated high resistance in fighting the regime faced total population removal and safe passage to rebel controlled areas (i.e. the Idlib governorate) (Glass 2017). Many deals concentrated on the peripheries of Damascus where the regime gradually expanding against rebel concentrations are a threat to its nerve centre, but also in Homs, Aleppo and elsewhere (Beals 2017). The reconciliations were regarded from the very beginning as part of a war strategy rather than a genuine desire to move toward power-sharing: promises pertaining to administrative decentralization and the special privileges promised to notables of reconciled areas were reversed over time and loyalists were systematically reintroduced into these areas.

Moreover, as the power balance has shifted its way, the regime's determination to bring all of Syrian territory back under its rule has been renewed. Regime media boasts that until recently the idea of a military victory was regarded as impossible to achieve but is no longer so and a return to a centralised government will be achieved (over time); only when it comes to the Kurdish areas does the regime exhibit uncertainty regarding the extent to which it can restore the old status quo. In private, regime connected figures admit the regime is reconciled to a continuing long struggle. Having achieved the upper hand on the ground at great cost, Assad has no interest in the concessions needed for a negotiated political transition).

Certainly, the opposition sees the reconciliation strategy as far from benign. Reconciliation deals do not amount to "reconciliation" but are either surrenders or temporary truces of convenience. In its most alarmist version, they are nothing less a plan for demographic re-engineering of Syria. Riyad Hassan Agha, of the Syrian opposition's Higher Negotiation Committee (HNC), sees it in these terms: make 12 million Syrians (predominantly Sunni) become displaced or refugees and force the remaining Sunnis of Damascus and the coast to accept their reduced role as a wounded minority which must show full allegiance. In parallel Iranian backed militias are introduced into areas where Sunni fighters depart as a strategy of Shia-ization (All4Syria Archive, <http://www.all4syria.info/Archive/355010>)

### **"Reconciliation" in Action: Processes And Outcome Variations**

We can get a better idea of both government intentions and the constraints it faces by surveying the processes by which reconciliation deals have been reached and what their outcome has been.

#### ***Process:***

The negotiators for the government were army and intelligence officers as well as pro-regime residents of contested areas such as tribal or religious leaders, while the opposition side included fighters, council activists, religious leaders and notables. The regime could not simply dictate the terms: e.g. pro-Assad notables with roots in East Ghouta made repeated negotiating trips to Islam Army-held Douma (Lund 2017a). Negotiations often broke down because the government insisted on surrender or if less was demanded, spoilers, those profiting from checkpoints on both sides, but especially the hard-line local regime militias grouped in the National Defence Force (NDF) who sometimes defied deals reached by government officials. In one instance, a reconciliation committee authorized by the government was killed by an Alawite militia. Bad faith and non-implementation especially by the government deterred further agreements. Opposition groups might prolong the fighting to keep access to outside funding. When fighters were foreign or had no stake in the affected area, they were less responsive to civilian suffering and demands to end the fighting (Turkmani and Kaldor 2014). In 2016, the Russians set up their own Centre for reconciliation that claimed to broker 1479 truces, which, if true, marked a serious acceleration in their pace (Adleh and Favier 2017).

#### ***Kinds of Agreements***

Kinds of agreement reflects not just the intentions of regime (and opposition) but the balance of power between them, and also factors such as whether a locale is strategic, its sectarian composition and the history of its role in the uprising.

**Type 1:** The most unbalanced form of agreement leads to displacement of the entire population, (many of whom will have previously fled the area), perhaps in a population exchange such as occurred in the so-called four towns agreement wherein Shiite villages encircled by the opposition were evacuated in parallel to Sunni evacuations from the Kalamoun area, e.g. from Zabadani. This strategy, in opposition eyes, is based on forcing the inhabitants to relocate with a view towards creating demographic changes in a so-called “beneficial Syria.” (Ezzi 2017)

In the case of Daraya, which was a platform for rebel attacks on regime-held Damascus and close to the Mezza military airport, not only was the population forced out, but also regime troops looted and razed the town. By contrast the neighbouring town of Moadamiyah, which had been more defensive in the conflict, was treated more generously. Many Daraya fighters went to Idlib, but others relocated to a new camp ten miles south of Damascus near Harjallah where new houses were built and free food, utilities, education and medical care were provided by the Red Crescent. Said one fighter: “We were given a choice. ...when I came here, ...everyone said the regime would take me to prison.” Evidently, this did not happen (Glass 2017).

In some places, a Sunni-Alawite sectarian faultline influenced the regime's approach: Homs centre city and al-Waer, rebellious Sunni areas, both suffered population evacuation, shifting the demographic balance in favour of Alawites.

**Type 2:** A somewhat less punitive deal required opposition fighters and activists to submit in return for lifting of sieges and restoring services but without large-scale population displacement. This version of ‘reconciliation’ was implemented in Qudsaya, Al-Hama, Al-Tal, Madaya, and the suburbs of eastern Damascus, among others. Anyone who was armed and did not accept government conditions was expelled. Submissive elements of the former armed opposition were absorbed into the regime’s local militias. The opposition’s local councils were dismantled since, offering an alternative to state institutions, they were seen as a threat to restoration of regime authority in rebel areas. Members of the reconciliation delegation, traditional dignitaries, merchants and clerics loyal to the official religious establishment become local leaders with temporary authority. Significantly, these deals allowed former Islamist clerics to be co-opted: e.g. in the town of Yalda in the southern Damascus countryside, the Imam of Masjid al-Saliheen after having been a judge in a Sharia court of the Islamist factions, joined the government side as did the Imam of the Beit Sahem Great Mosque, who was the commander of Liwa Sham al-Rasoul’s Saraya al-Sham. Through the former Mufti of Rif Dimashq, Sheikh Muhammad Adnan Afiouni, a disciple of the late Shaikh Ahmad Kuftaru, the regime rehabilitated them and gave them guarantees that they would not be prosecuted in return for their support for the policy of ‘reconciliation’. They were transformed into mediators between the people and the state. Although sieges were lifted in these cases, local humanitarian networks that had hitherto channelled aid from abroad were dismantled, as the government considered such delivery of aid to opposition areas a violation of its sovereignty. Now aid flowed only through government-affiliated channels where it might be diverted to loyalist hands or lost through corruption. The regime sometimes reneged on its promises to deliver services; in Al-Tal, electricity was not restored and there were arbitrary arrests by the pro-regime Qalamoun Shield militia. The regime managed to co-opt some FSA fighters into its National Defence Forces, capitalizing on infighting and grievances between opposition groups. But in many ‘reconciliation’ areas, the regime began imposing mandatory conscription (Adleh and Favier 2016; Ezzi 2017).

**Type 3:** The third type of agreement was more balanced as dictated by a power balance between regime and opposition. Under this type of deal rebels maintained control of their areas in return for handing over heavy weaponry and halting attacks on regime forces; in return, sieges were lifted, return of the displaced and restoration of public utilities (Hamlo 2015) The first agreement in Barzeh of June 2014 was along these lines and much more favourable to the opposition than other deals owing to the fact that it was a strategic location the government needed to recover but had not been able to do so and had suffered many casualties; as such it pushed for a ceasefire to neutralize this front. FSA fighters remained in control of their area, nominally transformed into a regime-sanctioned “popular army” charged with maintaining security and the army pulled back to

allow civilians to return, with the road to Damascus being opened. (Turkmani and Kaldor 2014). Later, however in May 2017, hundreds of rebels and their families were also evacuated after they decided to lay down their arms and leave to rebel-held Idlib province.

A similar deal was reached in 2014 in Jiroud, which thereafter remained peaceful. The deal was characterized by an opposition activist as a “temporary truce” that served the interests of the opposing sides. The government wanted to reduce the number of fronts in which it is engaged and the (pro-opposition) inhabitants of Jiroud sought to spare their town. In his words, “The government will have to exercise self-restraint ...because they cannot afford to reignite those fronts since the army is overstretched in such hotspots as Idlib, Deraa and Aleppo” (Hamlo 2015).

Al-Sanamayn in Dera muhafazat was a model for how the regime sought to deal, at minimum cost, with the wider rebel-held south. It was strategic, being home to an important base of the Syrian army's 9th division and a gateway between Dera and opposition areas of the Ghouta. Much of the town fell out of regime control and opposition local councils were set up, though most of the public services were still provided by the regime. The regime laid siege to the opposition controlled neighbourhoods which was lifted under an agreement that the rebels would not attack regime positions or personnel. Some (not all) weapons were handed over but no fighters were compelled to leave. The regime's security forces did not intervene in security and criminal incidents in the town, allowing the armed factions to deal with these matters: if the regime arrested someone's relatives, that person would retaliate by kidnapping military personnel or firing on a military zone. With all clans armed for self-defence, there was much lawlessness. Rather than conscription, the regime tried to recruit to the new Fifth Corp by offering substantial benefits. Facing manpower shortages, the regime saw this as a model for how to deal with the South; but it would not work in areas with a strong jihadi presence (Tamimi 2017).

**Type 4:** A fourth type of agreement resulted where the opposition bargaining position rested on its control of a resource crucial to the government. In Wadi Barada, the truce stipulated that the government forces would not interfere in the town at all, in return for secure pumping of drinking water to Damascus from al-Fija spring; “The rebels cut off water supply to Damascus more than once, blackmailing the government until the latter agreed to their demands, which were mostly about releasing prisoners from the regime's jails,” Eventually, however, the government invaded and took over the Wadi area. Similarly, rebel groups seized control of gas pipelines in the town of Mahsa, which supplied power plants in Damascus, using it to extort money from the government or to win the release of prisoners. In Aleppo control of the city's thermal powerplant was the object of practical agreement between regime and opposition (Hamlo 2015; Turkmani and Kaldor 2014).

### **Consequences of the Agreements**

Local reconciliation agreements have delivered humanitarian improvements and local peace that top down efforts failed to deliver. In the short term, Syrians accept them to get relief from war, but in the long term, obstacles to true reconciliation include government policies of forced conscription and displacement, loss of property of displaced, razing of informal settlements and lack of regime release of detainees (Adleh and Favier 2017).

Despite the regime's expressed aim of restoring centralized rule over Syria, this is impractical in the medium term, and indeed, even in government controlled areas, power has become de-centralized to local strongmen, in a way not too different from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> type of agreements with opposition areas. The last six years have created a culture of self-governance not only in areas that were outside of regime control, but even in areas like the coast and Damascus; a culture which the regime will have to adapt to. Indeed, it is in areas that remained under regime control that the regime will find it the most challenging to restore (assuming it actually desires to) to pre-uprising modes of governance. Millions of Syrians learned how to carry out their daily lives during periods when the government was far too preoccupied to deliver its previous services. These new survival skills often meant the rise of new organizations that the government tolerates because they are not politicized and are focused entirely on fulfilling functions that the government is too over stretched to carry out.

Local agreements need, however, to be incorporated into a comprehensive peace settlement; otherwise they will be mere war tactics used to neutralize one area so fighter is easier

elsewhere. (Turkmani) and will not deliver anything like reconciliation. Russian proposals seem to aim at just this and if they are realized will mean, in practice, a new more decentralized but also more lawless order for the medium term. As the situation stands today, the regime appears to have not only proven it can achieve military victory, but also that the only type of changes it is willing to tolerate are those decentralized forms of governance that are taking place within in the framework of reconciliations. These changes, however, insignificant as they may presently seem, strike at the very nature of pre-2011 Syria, and hence, ironically, what appears now as evidence of government triumph may eventually prove to be the foundation of a Syria not too different than that which the initial protests aspired to reach.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **List of Major Formal Evacuation/Reconciliation Agreements**

(From Shobassi, 2017)

#### **Homs, February 2014**

An agreement was reached between the Syrian regime and the United Nations on the evacuation of Syrian civilians from Homs and the entry of humanitarian aid into the city.

First Barzeh Agreement, June 2014: Ceasefire arranged; local fighters remain but refrain from attacking regime forces. Road opened, civilians return.

#### **Yarmouk, December 2015**

The Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) and the Syrian regime had reached an agreement to facilitate the departure of ISIL fighters and their families from southern Damascus neighbourhoods, including the al-Yarmouk, the Palestinian refugees camp.

The agreement was discreetly reached between the regime and ISIL through local and international mediation. It stated that the evacuees would be transferred to Beer Qassab town in Damascus's southeastern countryside, Homs's eastern countryside or Raqqa city.

#### **Qamishli City, April 2016**

An agreement was reached between the Syrian regime and the Kurdish People's Protection Units in Qamishli city. The agreement stated the following:

The Syrian regime reached a prisoners exchange deal with the Kurdish YPG in April 2016 [Reuters]

- Exchange of prisoners between the two parties.
- Upholding a ceasefire in the city.
- Discussing locations of posts where government forces and pro-government militias would be deployed and others where Kurdish forces would be deployed.
- All Kurds held prisoners by the government in Qamishli since before 2011 must be released.
- The regime will not arrest any Kurd for any reason nor will it arrest any Arab or Christian affiliated with the Kurdish People's Protection Units or working with the Kurdish administration.

**Daraya, August 2016** An agreement reached between the Syrian regime and opposition allowed civilians and armed opposition fighters to leave Daraya town in Damascus's countryside. The agreement stated the following:

- Civilians leave Daraya and head to regime-controlled areas in Sahnaya town, in Damascus's countryside.
- Armed fighters leave Daraya and head to Idlib, in northern Syria.
- The agreement is implemented under the supervision of the International Committee of the Red Crescent.

#### **Al Waer, September 2016**

" Al Waer Agreement " between the Syrian regime and the opposition under the patronage of the United Nations. The agreement stated the following:

- The regime halts the bombing of Al Waer neighbourhood in Homs.
- Opposition fighters are allowed to leave the neighbourhood, in separate groups, and head towards northern Syria, as follows:
  1. Three hundred fighters leave with their families from Al Waer to opposition-held areas in Idlib, and in return, the regime opens all roads leading to the neighbourhood and allows entry of food supplies to the area.
  2. The regime releases 200 Al Waer residents held in jail, and in return, 500 opposition armed fighters and their families will leave the neighbourhood and head towards Idlib.
  3. The regime reveals information about prisoners held in jail, and in return, 300 opposition armed fighters leave with their families.
  4. The opposition withdraws from government sites and posts in the neighbourhood as the rest of the armed fighters leave with their families.
  5. The Syrian regime is handed over full control over the neighbourhood.

#### **Moadamiyah, October 2016**

Hundreds of armed opposition fighters and their families left on October 19, 2016, the Damascus suburb of Moadamiyah heading towards Idlib, in northern Syria.

Up to 3,000 people were set to leave Moadamiyah as part of this deal between the Syrian regime and the opposition, including 620 armed fighters, their families and people from Daraya and Kafr Sousa who had been living in Moadamiyah after fleeing their homes.

#### **Qudssaya and al-Hama, Damascus's countryside**

In the same month, an agreement between the Syrian regime and opposition was reached on the departure of 600 opposition fighters with their families from. The agreement, effective starting from October 11, stated the following:

- Five hundred opposition fighters and their families leave Qudssaya and head towards Idlib.
- One hundred opposition fighters and their families leave Hama and head towards Idlib.
- The fighters must hand in their weapons.
- Opposition fighters who choose to stay in the towns hand in their arms and get their situation settled by the regime.
- The regime lifts the blockade imposed on civilians in the two towns.
- The regime restores water and electricity services in the two towns.

#### **Al Tal, November 2016**

An agreement reached between the Syrian regime and the opposition in Al Tal town in Damascus's countryside. The agreement stated the following:

- The opposition hands over Al Tal town to the regime.
- The regime allows opposition fighters, armed with light weapons, to leave Al Tal and head towards Idlib.

#### **Khan al-Sheeh, November 2016**

An agreement reached between the Syrian regime and the opposition groups to evacuate all the opposition's armed fighters from the Palestinian refugee camp of Khan al-Sheeh in Damascus's countryside to opposition-held areas in Idlib.

The agreement stated that opposition fighters could keep their light arms but must hand in their medium and heavy arms in return for ending the regime's shelling on the refugee camp, lifting the siege, allowing entry of humanitarian aid and restoring all public services in the camp.



### **East Aleppo, December 2016**

An agreement reached between the Syrian regime and the opposition on the evacuation of civilians and opposition armed fighters from east Aleppo, to head towards Aleppo's northern and western countryside.

### **Aleppo, December 2016**

An agreement between the Syrian armed opposition, including Ahrar al-Sham, on one side, and the Syrian regime and Russia, on the other, to allow the evacuation of civilians from Aleppo. The agreement stated the following:

- Full evacuation of Aleppo civilians in return for the evacuation of a set number of "people" from Kefraya and Foua, in Idlib's countryside, two towns besieged by the opposition's "Jaish al-Fatah", and others from Madaya and Zabadani, in Damascus's countryside, that are besieged by the pro-regime Hezbollah forces.

Aleppo residents gather to get onto buses to take them out of the besieged city.

### **Wadi Barada, January 2017**

"Wadi Barada" agreement signed between the Syrian regime and the opposition through the mediation of a German delegation. The agreement stated the following:

- Ceasefire between the two parties in Wadi Barada region.
- Armed opposition to leave Ain al-Fijeh town and head towards Deir Muqaran village.
- Armed opposition fighters and civilians who choose to remain in Wadi Barada must reach reconciliation with the regime and get their situation settled by the regime. Otherwise, they must leave to Idlib.
- The return of families of opposition fighters who had previously fled from Wadi Barada so they can escort the fighters (their relatives) as they head towards Idlib.

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### **Four Towns agreement, April 2017**

The "Four Towns" agreement between the Syrian opposition's "Tahrir al-Sham" and "Ahrar al-Sham", on one side, and the Syrian government, the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Iranian side, on the other. The agreement stated the following:

- Up to 3,800 people, including opposition fighters, to leave from Zabadani, in Damascus's countryside, and head towards Idlib.
- Up to 8,000 people, including pro-regime militiamen, to leave from Kefraya and Foua, in Idlib's countryside, and head towards Aleppo.
- Exchange of prisoners and dead bodies.
- Departure of those who want to leave Madaya, Zabadani and Bloudan towards the north.
- Release of 1,500 prisoners held by the Syrian government, mostly women.
- Resolving the case of 50 families, originally from Zabadani and Madaya, stuck in Lebanon in return for the departure of all of Kefraya and Foua's residents in two groups.

**Second Waer Agreement April 2017:** brokered by Russia in Homs: Batches of civilians and fighters continue to evacuate al-Waer under the Russian-brokered deal between the neighborhood committee and the regime on March 13. The "reconciliation deal," calls for a halt in military hostilities against the neighborhood and the evacuation of opposition fighters to other opposition-held areas.

**Qaboun and Second Barzeh agreement, May 15, 2017:** More than 1,500 rebels and their family members left the devastated district of Qaboun on the edge of Damascus on Sunday, as the Syrian army and its allies continue to advance in areas in and around the capital, rebels and state media said. Hundreds of rebels and their families were also evacuated from the adjacent Barzeh district after rebels there decided to lay down their arms and leave to rebel-held Idlib province.